

News Release
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Service Announces Critical Habitat Designations for Florida Brickell-Bush and
Carter's Small-Flowered Flax

VERO BEACH, Fla. – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is announcing critical habitat designations for two plants found only in South Florida: the Florida brickell-bush and Carter's small-flowered flax. Both were listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act on October 4, 2014. The critical habitat for both plants is located in Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Both plants only are found on the Miami Rock Ridge in South Florida. The critical habitat designations for these two plants largely overlap, for a combined total of about 2,706 acres. The plants' critical habitat designations include land in pine rockland habitat on the Miami Rock Ridge, outside of Everglades National Park, in Miami-Dade County, Florida. Areas within the designations include occupied and unoccupied, but suitable, habitat within the plants' historical ranges.

These two pine rockland plants had been candidates for federal listing since 1999. The listing of these plants with critical habitat and the associated economic analysis are part of the Service's efforts to implement a court-approved work plan aimed at addressing a series of lawsuits concerning the agency's ESA listing program. To learn more about the Service's work plan for 2015, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/candidateconservation/>.

Two construction projects are currently proposed in an area of Miami where pine rocklands exist: Coral Reef Commons and Miami Wilds. This critical habitat designation won't impact the proposed Coral Reef Commons construction project. However, the presence of listed species such as the Bartram's hairstreak butterfly and Florida bonneted bat could, which is why the Service is working with the stakeholders of this project to determine what the possible impacts to listed species might be and how those impacts might be mitigated or eliminated. In fact, the Service is working with the developer of the proposed Coral Reefs Commons project on a Habitat Conservation Plan that would help in that regard.

Because U.S. Coast Guard lands are included in the proposed Miami Wilds construction project, and would require transfer of the federal lands to the county, potential adverse impacts on critical habitat will be evaluated for this project as part of the required Section 7 consultation to avoid destruction or adverse modification of the critical habitat. However, regardless of this critical habitat designation, Section 7 consultation related to

the land transfer would still be required to address potential adverse impacts on listed plants and animals present on the property, including the Florida brickell-bush.

The vast majority of the historical pine rockland habitat on the Miami Rock Ridge has been developed or converted to agriculture, and much of the remaining areas are degraded because of inadequate fire management and proliferation of non-native invasive plants. A potential threat to both plants is sea level rise.

Current populations of these plants are between 2,150 to 3,700 plants for Florida brickell-bush, and about 1,300 plants for Carter's small-flowered flax. Compared to their historical ranges, the current ranges of both plants have shrunk significantly.

The draft economic analysis estimates that the total economic costs of the critical habitat designation for these plants are largely administrative and are not likely to exceed \$120,000 in 2013 dollars in a single year.

Under the ESA, critical habitat identifies geographic areas important to the species' survival. Although some of the areas within the critical habitat designation are located on private land, there are no federal regulations affecting critical habitat on private lands unless the activity is authorized, funded, or carried out by a federal agency. Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. If federal funds are involved in a project in the area, the government agency will need to consult with the Service to help landowners avoid, reduce or mitigate potential impacts to the plant or to ensure actions do not negatively affect these plants or modify their critical habitat.

Federal agencies must make a special effort at conservation when they work in an area designated as critical habitat for a listed species. The economic analysis estimates the cost of consultations with the Service when a federal agency works in an area designated as critical habitat, or funds or permits work done by others. Federal, state and local government agencies and some projects may incur costs for work involving federal funding or a federal permit. The estimate does not include any costs incurred as a result of the listing of these plants because the ESA states that listing a species is to be based solely on the best available scientific information.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfwssoutheast, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwssoutheast, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwssoutheast>.

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